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ABSTRACT

There are three types of contexts subject to evaluation of student writing; the textual context that influences grammatical acceptability and the rhetorical effectiveness of a sentence; the coded context or cultural constraints such as generic and stylistic conventions; and pragmatic contexts that unite form, function, and setting in a developmental relationship. Current evaluation systems can be categorized according to which context they address. Text-oriented systems view the text itself as entirely sufficient to express meaning and to reveal author intent. Code-oriented systems emphasize the role that conventions and rules play in text interpretation and evaluation, and, although no fully developed system for evaluating pragmatic contexts exists, some methods include reader-response thinking and others use protocol analysis as a means for making judgments about the text as it develops in the writer's mind. What is needed, however, are systems with process-oriented contexts, especially since most evaluation systems have been product-bound. Two possible approaches that can be taken for the development of process-oriented evaluation systems are (1) multiple draft measurements that would analyze the nature and quality of the changes made between drafts and would make "appropriate change" a criterion of evaluation; and (2) writer-reader protocols that would feature articulated response as a criterion of evaluation and assess the stated intent of the author vis-a-vis the effect the author's work actually has on its audience. (HOD)

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THEORETICAL ROOTS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEXTUAL EVALUATION

Helen Rothschild Ewald

In Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse, Mary Louise Pratt uses speech act theory to argue against the New Critical approach to literary criticism, that is, against an approach defined exclusively by textual considerations. Citing observations by sociolinguist William Labov, Pratt draws parallels between the devices of "natural narrative" embedded in speech acts and those elements informing the narrative of literary discourse. In so doing, she suggests how speech act theory can provide the groundwork for a context-dependent theory of literature.

Whether or not we, as teachers of writing, subscribe to Pratt's critique of New Criticism as a way of evaluating literary works, we can admit that, for the most part, we approach or evaluate student papers textually, not contextually. Yet these papers are the products of a process which involves a wide range of contexts, including personal world views and social milieu--the private and public worlds of our student writers. This paper, then, explores the question: how can we (or can we) go beyond the text and evaluate student writing contextually?

In addressing this question, I will discuss types of contexts subject to evaluation, inventory a number of current evaluation systems as they approach one or more of these contexts, and conclude by suggesting avenues of development for contextual evaluation.

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CONTEXTS

We may begin by positing three types of contexts subject to evaluation: textual contexts, coded contexts, and pragmatic contexts. These categories, while not all-inclusive, will give us an operational base for discussion.

Textual Contexts

The text, of course, creates its own contexts. These textual contexts may, for example, influence grammatical acceptability. Consider the following:

1. My peers.
2. Become a computer programmer?
3. Like fighting for the hiring of more full-time faculty and making some attempt to end exploitation rather than increase it?

All fragments. Yet rendered correct by their textual context. (For that context see "Memoirs and Confessions of a Part-time Lecturer," College English, January 1982, pp. 36 & 39.)

Textual context also influences the rhetorical effectiveness of a sentence. This is especially true with "non-initial sysematic structures" containing allusions or references to textual situation:[1]

1. And then there is feedback. (College Composition and Communication, December 1980, p. 397.)
2. So the intellectual climate conducive to this change has been developing for more than two decades. (College Composition and Communication, February 1982, p. 81.)
3. Such separation is not always easy. (College Composition and

Communication, December 1981, p. 401.)

Each of the above sentences achieves rhetorical effectiveness only when read within the larger framework of its respective text. As E. D. Hirsch, Jr. asserts in The Philosophy of Composition, "Any sentence in isolation is semantically uncertain, because it can mean whatever it might mean in an indefinite number of actual uses." Hirsch concludes it should therefore be our main business as composition teachers to show students how to make their writing "self-contextual."[2]

Coded Contexts

Texts exist within contexts. Some of these contexts can be said to be coded; that is, they are systematized in some way so that they can serve as signs or principles for the participants in a communication situation.

Whether public or private, coded contexts inform both oral and written discourse. Speech act theorists, for example, see conversation itself as rule (or code) governed behavior. Theorist H. P. Grice uses four sets of maxims to describe conversational rules:

1. maxims of quantity: provide enough information, but not too much
2. maxims of quality: be truthful, have evidence
3. maxims of relation: be relevant
4. maxims of manner: be orderly, clear, brief.[3]

If, for example, a speaker does not provide enough information for the current purposes of the exchange, he or she violates the maxim of quantity and thus may alienate listeners. In other words, conversations follow certain codes which are recognized by both speaker and listener.

The same norms seem to govern written discourse. Generally,

writers are expected to meet readers' expectations by providing adequate information or detail, by presenting generalizations which are "true" or tenable, by providing a focused and coherent discussion, and by being clear and concise. If, for instance, a writer fails to provide enough specific detail, he or she violates the maxim of quantity. In so doing, this writer may fail to convey the intended meaning to the audience.

Beyond establishing such general constaints, codes can feature specialized expectations. In his work Language in the Inner City, William Labov studies how specialized codes can govern oral discourse. He, for example, describes sophisticated rules which seem to govern the ritual insults and natural narratives of inner city speakers.[4] Codes governing written discourse can also be specialized, ranging from those which define the structure of a Ciceronian argument to those which govern the organization of a particular business letter, such as a negative claim adjustment. Generic and stylistic conventions, in other words, qualify as coded contexts.

In Semiotics and Interpretation, Robert Scholes suggests an even broader definition of coded contexts. He sees the codes of both oral and written discourse as part of a larger pattern of cultural constraints.[5] These cultural constraints themselves serve as coded contexts for writers. In this regard, Roland Barthes has observed that writers are influenced in their writing "by pressures beyond their immediate awareness, such as the broad cultural expectations and influences of history and tradition--frames and schemata of much more inclusive proportions" than those of a writer's immediate cultural conventions or personal background.[6]

Personal background is nevertheless important. It contributes to a writer's set of assumptions about the world which informs a private coded context. This private coded context, along with the more public contexts of generic conventions and cultural constraints, influences how a writer thinks and writes. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in detail how private codes influence a writer's thinking and writing, it can be shown here how subjective elements color certain tasks a writer faces. For example, when a writer engages in generative procedure, he or she necessarily invokes a set of assumptions about the world, a personal postulate system to help answer not only questions such as "How well does my topic reflect my social and/or ethical beliefs?" and "Why does the topic seem relevant to me?", but also those such as "What is the audience in relationship to me?" (hostile, objective), "Who is the audience in relationship to me?" (teacher, peer), and "How well does my audience know my subject?"[7] The writer's personal postulate system thus forms a subjective assessment of the rhetorical situation. The postulate system informs the set of values the writer projects on subject and audience, and influences author intent. Through composition this system, or a portion of it, is made public.[8] This is not to say, however, that the private codes of a writer are ever perfectly known.

Pragmatic Contexts

Texts also exist within contexts which remain process-oriented in nature. Pragmalinguistics studies such contexts in oral discourse. Pragmalinguistics or pragmatics is concerned with the relation that "unites (a) linguistic form and (b) the communicative functions that these forms are capable of serving, with (c) the settings in which those linguistic

forms can have those communicative functions."[9]

Linguist Charles J. Fillmore, for example, is interested in how the text "develops in response to ongoing events," both external and internal, and in how formal properties of texts can be related both to what the participants (the producers and interpreters of texts) are doing and what they are mentally experiencing."[10] Fillmore promotes discourse analysis which emphasizes the text's development in time, both from the communicator's and the audience's standpoint. Fillmore stresses a context which unites form, function, and setting in a developmental relationship.

Linda Flower and John Hayes in "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing" share Fillmore's developmental emphasis. In their model, "the major units of analysis are elementary mental processes" which have a "hierarchical structure." Flower and Hayes are interested in capturing "what is going on in the writer's mind during the act of composing itself."[11] In terms of interpretation, however, they restrict their attention to the writer's perception of his or her evolving text; they do not explore the audience's unfolding response to that same text.

EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Evaluation systems do exist which can deal with the aforementioned contexts. Indeed, current evaluation systems can be categorized according to which context they address.

Evaluating Textual Contexts

Text-oriented or "new critical" systems view the text itself as entirely sufficient to express meaning and to reveal author intent.[12] For example, E. D. Hirsch advocates judging texts according to their

"intrinsic quality of presentation."[13] Hirsch argues that this quality can be defined as the text's "relative readability." Central principles of readability include speedy resolution of semantic-syntactic ambiguity and speedy fulfillment of semantic-syntactic expectations. Although Hirsch acknowledges that extrinsic categories of assessment, including a reader's judgment concerning an author's intentions, do enter into evaluation, he prefers to evaluate a writer's work solely according to its intrinsic quality of presentation and its correctness. Nancy Sommers in "Responding to Student Writing" reflects this orientation in her call for text-specific criteria of evaluation. Sommers decries evaluative comments which can be "rubber-stamped" from text to text. She believes evaluation should entail text-specific recommendations for revision.[14]

Evaluating Coded Contexts

Code-oriented systems emphasize the role conventions and rules play in text interpretation and evaluation. In terms of interpretation, these systems assume that knowing codes helps the reader understand the text in situations where the writer says one thing but means something else, as is the case with "exaggeration, understatement, hints, irony, and all forms of figurative language--in particular, metaphor."[15] As stated by J. L. Morgan, our ability to understand what is being said or written depends not only on "conventions of language, that jointly give rise to the literal meanings of sentences," but also on "conventions about language that govern the use of sentences, with their literal meanings, for certain purposes" and that allow us to "somehow infer" those purposes or intentions.[16]

In terms of evaluation, code-oriented systems can be divided into those which evaluate a text according to public codes and those which

emphasize the influence of private codes. "Semiotic systems" focus on public codes. Lloyd-Jones' Primary Trait Scoring System is an example of this type, because it looks to norms invoked by rhetorical contexts for its evaluation criteria.[17] The Wilkenson Model, as adapted by Marilyn Sternglass, is another example. This Model assumes identifiable progress points within each of its four scales. The four scales of development are Stylistic Measures, Affective Measures, Cognitive Measures, and Moral Measures. The "moral measures" scale, for instance, evaluates how and to what degree a writer has "internalized the morality of the culture."[18] In both Lloyd-Jones and Wilkenson, certain coded contexts, whether rhetorical or cultural, provide benchmarks for evaluation. This is the case even though the Wilkenson Model is meant to be developmental and in this respect process-oriented.

"Intentional systems" explore the private codes a writer uses in a message. These systems handle author intent, error-analysis, and self-evaluation. Mary Louise Pratt proposes a method of evaluation which analyzes a text according to how its author purposely follows or flouts generic and stylistic conventions. Pratt's system could be adapted to analyzing student essays where the writer claims to or attempts to use a particular convention. In a different aspect, error-analysis examines surface structures to discover a writer's underlying and often idiosyncratic rules for composing. It is probably the most familiar evaluation system in this vein. Self-evaluation systems straddle the line between being code-oriented and process-oriented. In "How Writers Evaluate Their Own Writing," Susan Miller stresses the importance of self-evaluation according to subjective standards; in "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader," Donald Murray posits the existence of an "other self" which monitors a writer's composing

activity. Both Miller and Murray see the private codes that writers establish for themselves as crucial for the writers' evaluating their own work.[19] A teacher can incorporate such self-evaluation into his or her grading by having students articulate how well the finished product fulfills their intentions or measures up to their expectations. Self-evaluation can also monitor the writer's work-in-progress and thus be part of a process-oriented system.

Evaluating Pragmatic Contexts

No current process-oriented evaluation system clearly examines and evaluates texts as they develop for both writer and reader in the way Fillmore's work on developing response suggests is necessary. Flower and Hayes focus on the writer's processes and propose protocol analysis as a means for making judgments about the text as it develops in the writer's mind. In this method, a writer orally records responses to the emerging text. Other process-oriented systems examine how the text unfolds in the reader's mind. Although no fully developed system of reader-response criticism for student essays exists, Sommer's method includes some reader-response thinking. "In a first or second draft," she writes, "we need to respond as any reader would, registering questions, reflecting befuddlement, and noting places where we are puzzled about the meaning of the text."[20] Fillmore's own approach to discourse analysis in part resembles that of reader-response critic Stanley Fish who "rivets attention on the sequence of decisions, revisions, anticipations, reversals, and recoveries that the reader performs as he [or she] negotiates the text sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase."[21]

Fillmore, however, would join reader-response with writer-response

to achieve a more comprehensive method of assessment. As has been indicated, such a comprehensive process-oriented system which would consider both writer and reader remains without a prototype.

ASSESSMENT

An overview of evaluation systems suggests that we have been able to evaluate student writing contextually if the contexts involved have been somehow product-bound. We need, however, to develop further those systems concerned with process-oriented contexts. We especially lack a system which evaluates the text as it evolves for both writer and reader. Below are two of many avenues we can take in developing process-oriented evaluation systems.

1. Multiple Draft Measurements. Sommers and others recommend teachers examine more than one draft per assignment. However, this multiple-draft approach as it is currently conceived still measures each draft as a product. To become process-oriented, a multiple-draft approach would have to analyze the nature and quality of the changes made between drafts and would have to make appropriate change a criterion of evaluation.
2. Writer-Reader Protocols. Taped writer-reader protocols could evaluate drafts-in-progress or final products. Writers and readers alike could orally respond to what was being or had been written. Their response could proceed sentence-by-sentence or paragraph-by-paragraph. Writers and readers could also specifically respond to changes made between drafts. Analysis of these protocols could highlight similarities/differences between

the responses of writer and reader or between the reactions of two or more separate readers. Protocols would feature articulated response as a criterion of evaluation. They also could feature an assessment of the stated intent of the author vis à vis the effect the author's work actually had on its audience.

The absence of a good process-oriented system of evaluation to date may be, in the end, an indication of theoretical rather than pedagogical shortfall. Perhaps one reason for product-oriented systems dominating our current pedagogy is that the contexts they judge are more or less based on transmission models of communication. In his book Cognition, Convention and Communication (1980), Mark H. Bickhard distinguishes between transmission and transformational models of communication. According to Bickhard, transmission models, which assume that "communication consists fundamentally of the transmission of the encodings of underlying knowledge," are essentially product-oriented.[22] Even pragmatic contexts, which represent a movement toward a more process-oriented or transformational approach, feature a process which "does not go beyond the act-that-transmits."

Bickhard views product-oriented or transmission models as untenable. He proposes instead transformational models which view communication "as a form of interactive transformation" where what is being changed is neither the understanding of the audience nor the perspective of the communicator. Success or failure of communication does not depend on the writer's effecting the intended response in the reader's mind. In a transformational system, the object of communication itself becomes a social entity." It is "a commonality of understanding among the participants . . . a social definition of the situation."[23] A transformational model features interaction

within the social environment as its crucial context.

Whether or not Bickhard's model can be fruitfully applied to composition remains an issue open to study and debate. His emphasis on the interactive nature of the communication process, however, should provide insights into the process-oriented contexts which influence composing and, in turn, insights into the evaluation systems which address these contexts.

NOTES

[1]Nils Erik Enquist, "Contextual Acceptability and Error Evaluation," Paper given at the Conference on Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis. Stockholm & Abo, 7-8 February 1977.

[2]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., The Philosophy of Composition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p.8.

[3]H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in Syntax and Semantics: Speech Acts, eds. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 47-48.

[4]William Labov, Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 1972), pp. 297 ff.

[5]Robert Scholes, Semiotics and Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 5-6.

[6]See Anthony R. Petrosky, "From Story to Essay: Reading and Writing," College Composition and Communication, XXXII (February 1982), pp. 25-26.

[7]Cf. Theodore R. Sarbin, Ronald Taft, and Daniel Bailey, Clinical Inference and Cognitive Theory (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), pp. 145 ff.; Helen Rothschild Ewald, "Clinician and Writer: Their Crucible of Involvement," Resources in Education, August 1981.

[8]See Petrosky, p. 20

[9]Charles J. Fillmore, "Pragmatics and the Description of Discourse," Radical Pragmatics, ed. Peter Cole (New York: Academic Press, 1981), pp. 145 ff.

[10]Fillmore, pp. 148-149.

[11]Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," College Composition and Communication, XXXII (December 1981), pp. 367-68.

[12]See Scholes, pp. 10ff.

[13]Hirsch, pp. 62, 186.

[14]Nancy Sommers, "Responding to Student Writing," College Composition and Communication, XXXIII (May 1982), pp. 151-152.

[15]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 207

[16]J. L. Morgan, "Two Types of Convention in Indirect Speech Acts," Technical Report #52, July 1977.

[17]See Lee Odell and Charles R. Cooper, "Procedures for Evaluating Writing: Assumptions and Needed Research," College English, Vol. 42 (September 1980), pp. 39-41.

[18]Marilyn Sternglass, "Applications of the Wilkenson Model of Writing Maturity to College Writing," College Composition and Communication, XXXIII (May 1982), pp. 168ff.

[19]Cf. Susan Miller, "How Writers Evaluate Their Own Writing," and Donald Murray, "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader," in College Composition and Communication, XXXIII (May 1982).

[20]Sommers, p. 155

[21]Jane P. Tompkins, ed. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. xvi.

[22]Mark H. Bickhard, Cognition, Convention, and Communication (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980), pp. 10, 14.

[23]Bickhard, pp. 12, 28 ff.